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Harris Survey

Majority says save the CIA

By Louis Harris

BY A 47 to 27 per cent plurality, Americans favor "making the Central Intelligence Agency more accountable to civilian authorities, but not changing the way it is now run," according to the results of the latest Harris Survey.

By 80 to 6 per cent, a large majority of those surveyed rejects the notion of "abolishing the CIA and leaving the U.S. with no foreign intelligence agency."

A 45 to 34 per cent plurality also opposes "abolishing the CIA, but starting a new foreign intelligence agency with proper civilian controls and safeguards."

THE RESULTS of this survey, conducted recently among a cross-section of 1,403 adults nationwide, make it clear that Americans are opposed to the abolition of the CIA, altho they support steps to make the security agency more accountable to the elected officials in government. By 43 to 31 per cent, a plurality would also support a move to "put in a civilian head of the CIA, but not abolishing it."

On a number of specific areas, however, those surveyed are critical of the CIA.

By 74 to 11 per cent, a majority believes "it was wrong for the CIA to be involved in the assassination attempts of foreign leaders."

By 54 to 29 per cent, a majority also believes "it was wrong for the CIA to have spied on Americans here at home during the Viet Nam war."

By 49 to 21 per cent, a plurality agrees with the charge that "the trouble with the CIA is that it got out of control of civilian authorities."

And by 66 to 18 per cent, a sizable majority believes that "in the future,



A symbol on the rise

the CIA must be monitored more closely by Congress and the White House."

But by a convincing majority, 52 to 24 per cent, those surveyed reject the charge that "if it had not been exposed, the CIA might have taken over the country." To the contrary, Americans value maintaining the CIA despite some errors it has committed recently. Also:

By 78 to 12 per cent, a solid majority believes "it is very important that the U.S. have the best foreign intelligence agency in the world, even if it does make some mistakes."

By 71 to 13 per cent, a majority also believes that "any successful foreign intelligence agency must be operated in secrecy."

By 52 to 28 per cent, the public is worried that "so many secrets of the CIA have been made public that the future ability of the CIA to operate well has now been threatened."

By 40 to 27 per cent, a plurality is convinced that "most of the CIA's activities involve serious study of other countries and are not involved with spying or violence."

In the last year, the public has given the CIA negative marks in Harris Surveys, but that criticism has not been rising despite more recent disclosures about the agency's alleged wrong-doing. The Harris Survey asked its respondents:

"How would you rate the job the Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] has done as the chief source of foreign intelligence for the U.S. government—excellent, pretty good, only fair, or poor?"

	Positive	Negative	Not sure
August, 1975	36	33	31
January	34	39	27
September, 1974	31	40	29

As the CIA has become a better known institution in the last year, the number of Americans who give it a positive rating has risen 5 points, altho the agency's negative marks also have risen 3 points. Its ratings tend to parallel those of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other federal law-enforcement agencies.

THE VARIOUS bodies that have been investigating the CIA have not been building enormous reservoirs of public confidence. The cross-section was asked:

"There have been several recent investigations of the CIA. Do you feel the [read list] investigations have been fair and just, too harsh on the CIA, or a whitewash of the CIA?"

	Fair and just	Too harsh	Whitewash	Not sure
Rockefeller commission	33	23	33	11
U.S. Senate Church Committee	28	11	53	8
U.S. House Intelligence Committee	28	4	13	55

The result of the probes of CIA has been to produce public sentiment for a change in the way the foreign intelligence agency does its job. But it is also apparent that the public does not want a change so drastic that it would jeopardize current CIA operations or lead to the agency's abolition.

Instead, the public appears to want the CIA to go about its business, most of which is secret, but with greater accountability to Congress and the White House.

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According to Mr. Thuermer's gal, this
was the best write-up and copy of the
Harris Poll. (Will distribute, if
ok!

del (4 September 1975

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